

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8424

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DEPT PASS AID FOR NE. PASS ALSO PEACE CORPS.

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID, AF, US
SUBJECT: U.S. ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN: MEETING WITH THE
MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH, DR. SHAH WALI

1. SUMMARY: ON JUNE 6, ACCCOMPANIED BY THE AID AND PEACE CORPS
DIRECTORS, I MADE MY INITIAL CALL ON THE NEW MINISTER OF
PUBLIC HEALTH, DR. SHAH WALI. WE DISCUSSED AFGHANISTAN'S HEALTH
PROBLEMS AND BRIEFLY REVIEWED AID AND PEACE CORPS PROJECTS IN
THE HEALTH SECTOR. THE MINISTER WAS UNEASY, VAGUE AND OFTEN
APPEARED EVASIVE. ONLY ON BEING PRESSED, DID HE FINALLY STATE
HE WANTED TO CONTINUE WITH THE ON-GOING BASIC HEALTH SERVICES
PROJECT AND SAID THAT WE SHOULD HOLD FOLLOW-ON DISCUSSIONS WITH
HIS STAFF. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCCOMPANIED BY THE AID AND PEACE CORPS DIRECTORS, I MADE
MY INITIAL CALL ON THE NEW MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH, DR. SHAH
WALI. UNLIKE AT OUR OTHER MINISTERIAL CALLS, WE WERE NOT
MET BY ANY MINISTRY OFFICIAL WHEN WE ARRIVED, AND MADE OUR OWN
WAY TO THE MINISTER'S OFFICE ON THE 4TH FLOOR. WE WERE
THEN KEPT WAITING APPROXIMATELY 15 MINUTES BEFORE BEING SHOWN
IN TO THE MINISTER.

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3. FROM THE OUTSET, THE MINISTER SEEMED VERY NERVOUS AND ILL
AT EASE, AND GENERALLY AVOIDED EYE CONTACT. WHEN HE SPOKE,
IT WAS IN A VERY LOW, ALMOST INAUDIBLE VOICE.

4. AFTER SOME OPENING PLEASANTRIES, TO WHICH HE RESPONDED
HESITANTLY AND SOMEWHAT AWKWARDLY, I ASKED THE MINISTER HOW
HE PERCEIVED THE HEALTH SITUATION OF THE COUNTRY, WHAT HIS PLANS

WERE FOR ADDRESSING HEALTH PROBLEMS, AND HOW HE ENVISAGED AMERICAN ASSISTANCE IN THE HEALTH SECTOR. THE MINISTER RESPONDED BY NOTING THE SERIOUS SHORTAGE OF PHYSICIANS IN THE COUNTRY--THAT OF THE 1500 AFGHAN PHYSICIANS, ONLY 900 REMAINED IN AFGHANISTAN, 600 HAVING LEFT TO PRACTICE IN ARAB COUNTRIES AND THE WEST. HE SAID THIS WAS THEIR FIRST IMPORTANT PROBLEM. HE WENT ON TO POINT OUT THE SERIOUS DISCREPANCY IN RESOURCE ALLOCATION BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL SERVICES, AND SAID THAT 90 PERCENT OF HEALTH RESOURCES WERE DIRECTED AT 10 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION. HE DESCRIBED THE SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS HIS COUNTRY FACED INCLUDING MALARIA, TB, OPIUM ADDICTION, DEFICIENT POTABLE WATER SYSTEMS, INADEQUATE SEWAGE DISPOSAL, AND POOR MATERNAL, CHILD-HEALTH (MCH) SERVICES. HE THEN STOPPED--WITHOUT MAKING ANY COMMENT ON THE PLAN THE GOVERNMENT HAD FOR ADDRESSING THESE CONCERNS, OR ANY MENTION OF A POSSIBLE ROLE FOR FOREIGN ASSISTANCE.

5. NOTING THAT HIS CONCERNS IN THE HEALTH SECTOR APPEARED TO MESH WELL WITH AID AND PEACE CORPS PRIORITIES, I INDICATED THAT THE CURRENT USAID PROJECT INVOLVING THE MANAGEMENT SCIENCES FOR HEALTH CONTRACT TEAM (MSH) SOUGHT TO ADDRESS MANY OF THESE PROBLEMS. THE AID DIRECTOR ELABORATED ON THE CURRENT PROJECT STATUS. HE SAID THAT DISCUSSIONS WERE UNDERWAY AT THE TIME OF THE REVOLUTION CONCERNING A POSSIBLE EXPANDED PROGRAM WHICH WOULD FOCUS ON IMPROVED HEALTH MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AND THE TESTING ON A REGIONAL BASIS IN GIRISHK OF A BASIC HEALTH DELIVERY SYSTEM. THE MINISTER READ THE HEALTH BRIEFING PAPER GIVEN HIM AND ONLY

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COMMENTED THAT HE WAS NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE DETAILS OF THIS PROJECT. FYI: WE SUBSEQUENTLY LEARNED FROM THE MSH TEAM THAT HE WAS BRIEFED ON THIS PROJECT PRIOR TO THE MEETING. END FYI.

6. THE AID DIRECTOR THEN BRIEFLY DISCUSSED OUR ASSOCIATION WITH THE AFGHAN FAMILY GUIDANCE ASSN. (AFGA) AND ASKED IF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH WAS STILL RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS ACTIVITY, AND IF HIS MINISTRY STILL INTENDED TO ASSIMILATE AFGA'S MCH CLINICS. THE MINISTER RESPONDED AFFIRMATIVELY TO BOTH QUESTIONS. THE AID DIRECTOR ASKED HOW AID SHOULD PROCEED NEXT WITH RESPECT TO THESE PROJECTS BUT WAS ONLY GIVEN A VAGUE REPLY.

7. THE PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR THEN OUTLINED AREAS OF PAST AND CURRENT PEACE CORPS INVOLVEMENT AND HOW THESE RELATED TO MANY OF THE AREAS OF CONCERN MENTIONED EARLIER. HE STRESSED THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCE PEACE CORPS HAD HAD WITH PROJECTS INVOLVING COOPERATION WITH AID AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL DONORS. HE ASKED IF THE MINISTER SAW A ROLE FOR PEACE CORPS IN THE HEALTH SECTOR. THE MINISTER SAID THAT HE MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERS IF THEY POSSESSED A HIGHER LEVEL OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE THAN HE HAD NOTED IN HIS DEALINGS WITH PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN THE PAST. THE PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR SAID THAT THE

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED OF A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER WERE LARGEY DETERMINED BY THE RECIPIENT MINISTRY, AND THAT HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO DISCUSS ANY QUALIFICATIONS AND FUTURE ROLES FOR VOLUNTEERS THE MINISTRY MIGHT DESIRE. THE PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR ASKED JUST HOW HE SHOULD PROCEED NEXT AND THE MINISTER RESPONDED THAT HE SHOULD TAKE THISUP WITH DR. ROSHAN, PRESIDENT OF FOREIGN RELATIONS.

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DEPT PASS AID FOR NE. PASS ALSO PEACE CORPS.

8. THE USAID DIRECTOR AGAIN ASKED THE MINISTER WHAT NEXT STEPS SHOULD BE TAKEN TO FOLLOW UP ON THE AID PROJECT ISSUES DISCUSSED EARLIER. THE MINISTER'S RESPONSE WAS EXTREMELY VAGUE, AND APPEARED EVASIVE. THE USAID DIRECTOR ASKED IF HE SHOULD CONTACT ANYONE IN THE MINISTRY OR SHOULD HE WAIT TO BE CONTACTED BY THE MINISTRY. AGAIN, THE MINISTER EVADED THE QUESTION. I THEN ASKED THE MINISTER POINT BLANK WHETHER HE WISHED THE MSH TEAM TO CONTINUE ITS OPERATIONS. THE MINISTER APPEARED EXTREMELY NERVOUS AND EMBARRASSED BUT FINALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE DID WANT THEM TO STAY. I TOLD THE MINISTER THAT I WANTED TO BE VERY CLEAR ON THIS POINT; I SAID THAT WHILE IT WAS UP TO HIS GOVERNMENT TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT U.S. ASSISTANCE FITTED INTO THEIR PRIORITIES, WE ALSO MUST BE SATISFIED THAT IT FITTED OURS. I SAID THAT THE MINISTER MUST LET US KNOW WHETHER OR NOT HE WISHES OUR ASSISTANCE, AND IF HE DOES, WE MUST KNOW HOW TO PROCEED. I SAID HE SHOULD NOT FEEL IN ANY WAY PRESSURED TO RECEIVE OUR ASSISTANCE, THAT THERE WERE OTHER COUNTRIES WHERE OUR ASSISTANCE WAS NEEDED AND DESIRED. THE MINISTER HASTILY RETORTED THAT THERE WERE ALSO OTHER COUNTRIES HELPING AFGHANISTAN. HE STATED SOMEWHAT MORE CLEARLY THAT HE DID WANT THE MSH TEAM TO STAY, AND SAID, FINALLY, THAT WE SHOULD MEET WITH DR. MUJADADI, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF BASIC HEALTH

SERVICES, FOR FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSIONS.

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9. AS WE TOOK OUR LEAVE, I ASKED THE MINISTER IF ANY DECISION HAD

YET BEEN REACHED CONCERNING THE PROPOSED CARE-MEDICO PROJECT IN LASHKAR GAH. THE MINISTER SAID HE HAD DECIDED THAT CARE-MEDICO SHOULD NOT GO AHEAD IN LASHKAR GAH, AT LEAST FOR THE PRESENT, BUT SHOULD INSTEAD CONCENTRATE MORE EFFORT AT JAMHURIAT HOSPITAL. ON THIS NOTE, I THANKED THE MINISTER AND WE TOOK OUR LEAVE.

10. COMMENT: THE BEHAVIOR OF THE MINISTER DURING OUR VISIT WAS EXTREMELY PECULIAR. HE SELDOM LOOKED ANY OF US IN THE EYE, SPOKE ONLY IN ANSWER TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS, AND GAVE RESPONSES WHICH WERE HESITANT, OFTEN NON-RESPONSIVE IF NOT EVASIVE, AND DELIVERED IN A VERY LOW, ALMOST INAUDIBLE VOICE. AS THE MEETING PROGRESSSED, I BECAME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED THAT HIS VAGUENESS, AND ALLEGED LACK OF FAMILIARITY WITH AID PROJECT DETAILS, WAS A DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO AVOID ANY SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION CONCERNING AID INVOLVEMENT. IT WAS FOR THIS REASON I POINTEDLY ASKED HIS INTENTIONS REGARDING THYSAPU PROJECT TOWARDS THE END OF THE MEETING. THE MINISTER'S RESPONSE DID NOT ALLAY MY CONCERNS. END OF COMMENT.

ELIOT

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